

DIOCESAN GUIDELINE
FAMILY LIFE CURRICULUM: A Catechesis of Relationships
DIOCESE OF JOLIET
(Adopted in 2001)

The development of the whole person is a major concern of the Catholic Church. The purpose of education in human sexuality whether formal or informal, is threefold:

“To give each learner an understanding of the nature and importance of sexuality as a divine gift, a fundamental component of personality, and an enrichment of the whole person- body, emotions, soul- whose deepest meaning is to lead the person to the gift of self in love (cf. Educational Guidance in Human Love, nos. 4, 16; Familiaris Consortio, nos. 37, 11, 32)

“To give each learner an appreciation of chastity as a virtue that develops a person’s authentic maturity and makes him or her capable of guiding the sexual instinct in the service of love and integrating it into his or her psychological and spiritual development (cf. Educational Guidance, nos. 4, 18, 34; Familiaris Consortio, no. 37)

“To give each learner an appreciation of the human and Christian values that sexuality is intended to express and to lead each learner to a knowledge of, respect for, and sincere personal adherence to the moral norms regarding sexuality that are taught by the Church (cf. Educational Guidance, nos. 19, 40; Familiaris Consortio, nos. 33, 37).

(Human Sexuality: Catholic Perspective for Education and Lifelong Learning, pp. 74-75)

This Vatican document resonates similar concerns of the U.S. bishops’ document, *The Truth and Meaning of Human Sexuality*. As Catholic educators we are responsible for providing a thorough and affirming catechesis of human sexuality.

FAMILY LIFE CURRICULUM

As Christians, we seek to understand the dimensions of good life choices through the image of Jesus, who describes himself as *the way, the truth and the life*. (John14:6) As disciples we are called to live a faith rooted in relationships: family, community and universal.

It is the expectation of the diocese that all aspects of catechetical ministry to children and adolescents provide an effective program concerning human sexuality. This expectation applies to Catholic schools, parish religious education programs and youth ministry.

The norms for this objective may include the following.

- A K-8 family life program is strongly recommended for Catholic schools.
This approach provides a holistic development toward a healthy appreciation of sexuality, inclusive of physical and emotional development within a Catholic context.

The curriculum complements catechetical formation and enhances sexuality as part

of the Christian vocation. Thus, students are better prepared to address dimensions of human sexuality in an age-appropriate manner. Moreover, these programs contain parent resources which invite parents to be a primary partner in a healthy development of children, especially on matters of a sensitive nature.

- At the minimum, education for Christian sexuality takes place at grades 5-8 in Catholic schools. Preliminary sessions may provide a foundation so students recognize sexuality as an integral part of the total Christian experience, and not perceived as a problem. These sessions should occur in grade 4.
- Likewise, parish religious education programs and youth ministries are charged with the responsibility of human sexuality formation. Time variance may not allow for a full-scale program to be implemented. Nonetheless, directors of religious education and youth ministers are responsible for addressing this aspect of Christian vocation within the program.

Procedure of Approved Curriculum

- The Religious Education Office (REO), in consultation with the Catholic Schools Office, approves the family life program. The REO publishes an annual list of approved programs and services.
- In addition to abstinence as a primary component of Catholic teaching, the curriculum should also address other dimensions of human sexuality that concern students. All family life curricula should enhance all dimensions of a thorough sexual education in a manner consistent with Catholic teaching.
- Alternative family life programs should be approved by the REO. All curricula should encompass a total human development: biological, social, and moral. Alternatives must be submitted to the REO for approval.

IMPLEMENTING A FAMILY LIFE PROGRAM

Based on the Catholic premise that parents/guardians are the primary educators of their children, Catholic educators must provide a clear correspondence with parents concerning family life curricula. It is the responsibility of catechetical programs and Catholic schools to provide sexual education that is conducive to the development of students, adherent to Catholic teachings, and sensitive to family dynamics. A message from the Congregation for Catholic Education presents clarification in this mission.

In order to make a valid contribution to the harmonious and balanced development of the young, teachers must regulate their teaching according to the particular role that falls to them. The pupil neither perceives or receives in the same manner from different teachers the information and motivation which they give, because different teachers affect his or her intimacy in a different way. Objectivity and prudence must characterize such teaching.

Progressive information requires a partial explanation, but always according to truth. Explanations must not be distorted by reticence or by lack of frankness. Prudence therefore requires of the teacher not only an appropriate adaptation of the matter to the expectations of the pupil, but also a choice of language, mode and time in which the teaching is carried out. This requires that the child's sense of decency be taken into account. The teacher, moreover, remembers the influence of parents: their preoccupation with this dimension of education, the particular character of family education, their concept of life, and their degree of openness to other educational spheres.

One must insist first of all on the human and Christian values of sexuality, so that pupils can appreciate them, and so that the desire to realize them in one's personal life and relationship may be roused. Without disregarding the difficulties which sexual development involves, but without creating an obsessive state, the teacher may have confidence in the educational enterprise: it can rely on the resonance which true values strike in the young, when they are presented with conviction, and are confirmed by testimony of life.

Given the importance of sex education in the integral formation of the person, teachers, taking account of the various aspects of sexuality and their incidence in the global personality, are urged in particular not to separate knowledge from corresponding values, which give a sense and orientation to biological, psychological and social information. Consequently, when they present moral norms, it is necessary that they show how to find their *raison d'être* and value.

Educational Guidance in Human Love, #86-89

Correspondence with parents and parishioners is a key factor in implementing a family life program. The following measures are suggested for this procedure.

1. Discuss the family life curriculum with the parish staff on an annual basis. This assures consistent awareness when staff changes occur.
2. Inform parents at the beginning of the school year that family life is part of the curriculum. This can be addressed through the parent handbook or a curriculum night for parents.
3. Mention a parish-wide family life program in the parish bulletin so that all parishioners are made aware of this fact. This announcement eases tension when students may be discussing family life issues with adults present.
4. Send a reminder letter to parents informing them of the family life curriculum prior to the actual instruction. Gathering parents for continued education and dialogue is highly recommended. Formation opportunities may assist parents in appreciating Church teaching and entering into dialogue with their children.
5. Contact parents when a child seems to have questions on sensitive matters so the parent can address them according to his or her discretion.
6. Allow parents the option of excluding their children from this curriculum. Materials should be sent to the parents to allow them to address human sexuality in their own manner. Requests to withdraw students from the family life curriculum discussions need to be submitted on an annual basis.
7. Excuse exempt students from the instruction in a dignified manner. Predetermined alternatives should be discussed in a conference between the administrator and parents.
8. Distribute parent resources through a safe means of delivery. This information, provided by publishers or other reputable sources, assists parents in understanding and addressing sensitive sexual topics.
9. Assess the curriculum on an annual basis to assure effective instruction.

**APROVED FAMILY LIFE CURRICULUM
DIOCESE OF JOLIET RELIGIOUS EDUCATION OFFICE
2002**

PRIMARY TEXTS

These publications serve as the primary texts for a family life curriculum. All primary texts are found to be in conformity with the Catechism of the Catholic Church.

Benziger *Benziger Family Life 2001* (K-8 curriculum)

Harcourt Religion Publishers *Growing in Love* (K-8 curriculum)

Our Sunday Visitor *The Catholic Vision of Love* (5-8 curriculum)

SUPPLEMENTARY TEXTS

These publications can serve as resources but require additional sources of human sexuality to suffice for an appropriate curriculum.

Project Reality *Choosing the Best* (junior high curriculum)

Sadlier *In God's Own Making* (5-8 curriculum)
(Addresses abstinence only)

St. Anthony Messenger Press *In God's Image Video Series* (Junior high curriculum)
(1989 copyright warrants concern on presentation)

ADDITIONAL SOURCES

The following programs provide instruction in accordance with diocesan standards.

Robert Crown Center

Natural Family Life Planning Institute